COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA

Office of Immigrant Relations

Fiscal Year
2023 - 2024

Annual Report

OIR
Office of Immigrant Relations
Division of Equity & Social Justice

Introduction

The Office of Immigrant Relations (OIR), part of the Division of Equity and Social Justice (DESJ) within the Office of the County Executive, is dedicated to recognizing the contributions of immigrants and to fostering their integration and sense of belonging. Santa Clara County has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the state: 40.6% of all residents are immigrants, and over 85% of immigrants speak a language other than English at home.[1]

Despite their significant role in the county's labor force, business creation, and consumer spending, immigrants continue to face barriers that impact their health and well-being.[2] OIR envisions Santa Clara County as a community where immigrants feel safe, have access to resources, experience a sense of belonging, and can thrive, regardless of immigration status. Working with various partners, we accomplish our goals through policy

[1] County of Santa Clara Office of Immigrant Relations and American Immigration Council (September 2023). *New Americans in Santa Clara County: The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County* (https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/new-americans-santa-clara-county).
[2] Ibid.

analysis and action, through community engagement efforts, and by providing access to community services.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-2024, our office embraced several significant successes, including:

- In September 2023, OIR, in partnership with the American Immigration Council, published *New Americans in Santa Clara County: The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County*,[3] a report that highlights the demographic and economic contributions of immigrants in Santa Clara County and that serves as a useful reference for community members and decision-makers.
- In fall 2023, OIR collaborated with community partners to respond to newly arriving migrants with compassion and dignity. The County's longstanding commitment to supporting new arrivals from all over the world, including those seeking protection and asylum, was evident as the County worked with Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Equality (Amigos) to provide temporary emergency shelter.
- OIR continued its needs assessment, called the Immigrant Belonging Project, in partnership with the Othering and Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley (OBI).
- OIR collaborated with several organizations to jointly host impactful communityevents that foster a sense of welcoming and belonging.
- In summer 2024, OIR welcomed its eighth cohort of the New Americans Fellowship (NAF) program.
- OIR administered nearly $6 million in contracts for immigration legal support services to ensure access to these services either for free or at a reduced cost.

The policies and rhetoric of the incoming Trump administration, which aim to implement the largest mass deportation campaign in U.S. history, will undoubtedly leave a profound impact on one of California's most immigrant-rich counties, home to over 765,000 immigrant residents. It is imperative that we counter the misleading narratives at the heart of this challenge, while striving to establish fair immigration policies that acknowledge the humanity and rightful place of immigrants in our society. OIR reaffirms its dedication to helping immigrant rights and foster a welcoming environment for all. Our efforts will remain rooted in principles of equity, collaboration, and solidarity.

In community,

-Office of Immigrant Relations

[3] https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/new-americans-santa-clara-county

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About the Office of Immigrant Relations

OIR supports the County's mission by promoting immigrant integration and belonging, uplifting immigrant contributions and resources, and addressing issues and needs of immigrant communities.

Our Mission

The mission of the County of Santa Clara is to plan for the needs of a dynamic community, provide equitable quality services, and promote a healthy, safe, and prosperous community for all.

Our Vision

OIR envisions Santa Clara County as a place where all community members—including immigrants and refugees—are safe, trusted, respected, recognized for their contributions, and provided equitable access to services and decision-making so that they can truly belong and thrive

Our Approach to Equity

In alignment with DESJ's strategic pro-equity framework, OIR helps ensure full and equal access to information, services, resources, opportunities, and power to improve outcomes for all. OIR works in collaboration with other division teams to address social inequities in an intersectional way.

Our Team

OIR celebrated the professional transitions of Aundraya Martinez (Senior Management Analyst and Acting OIR Manager) and Lou Jimenez (extra-help Associate Management Analyst). We welcomed Sheila Peralta (Senior Management Analyst) and Juan Coronado (extra-help Associate Management Analyst) to the OIR team. Additionally, we are actively seeking to hire a new OIR Manager.

Julie Ramirez
DESJ Program Manager III

Sheila Peralta
Senior Management Analyst

Teresa Castellanos
Immigrant Services Coordinator

Sandy Vasquez
Management Analyst

Juan Coronado
Associate Management Analyst – Extra-Help

Status of Immigrants in Santa Clara County

OIR's *New Americans in Santa Clara County* report serves as a preliminary step in pursuing Certified Welcoming County designation by Welcoming America—a national nonprofit organization leading a movement of inclusive communities in becoming more prosperous by helping ensure that everyone belongs, including immigrants. The report also underscores immigrants' integral role in Santa Clara County's labor force, business creation, and consumer spending power.

- **Immigrants are helping Santa Clara County meet its labor force demands.** In 2021, immigrants made up 40.6% of the county's population yet comprised 47.7% of the working age population and accounted for 49.9% of the employed labor force.
- **Immigrants contribute to the local economy.** In 2019, immigrants contributed $6.7 billion to state and local taxes and held 53.4% of all spending power in Santa Clara County.
- **Immigrant households support the federal safety net.** In 2021, immigrants contributed $5.1 billion to Social Security and $1.8 billion to Medicare in Santa Clara County.
- **Immigrants play a significant role as entrepreneurs in Santa Clara County.** In 2021, immigrants represented 50.3% of business owners in Santa Clara County and generated $1.5 billion in business income for the county.
- **Immigrants are helping Santa Clara County fill crucial labor force needs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields and other key industries.** In 2021, despite making up 40.6% of the county's total population, immigrants accounted for 67.2% of the region's STEM workers, 64% of manufacturing workers, and 56.3% of professional service workers.
- **Immigrants are helping keep jobs in the U.S.** Immigrants in Santa Clara County helped create or preserve approximately 35,200 local manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise been eliminated or moved elsewhere by 2021.

765,800
immigrants were living in Santa Clara County in 2021.

Immigrants made up **40.6%** of the total population in 2021.

55.9% of households in Santa Clara County had at least one immigrant member.

22.2% of immigrants in Santa Clara County were recent arrivals with five years or less in the U.S., meaning that **77.8%** of immigrants in the county had lived in the U.S. for more than five years.

Policy Analysis and Action

Title 42 Response

The sunset of public health order Title 42 on May 11, 2023, allowed migrants to once again exercise their fundamental right to seek asylum, protection, and safety in the U.S. In collaboration with local jurisdictions and community partners, OIR co-designed a coordinated response in anticipation of new arrivals to Santa Clara County. The response included an agreed-upon workflow that local jurisdictions and immigrant-serving organizations would enact should a group of migrants arrive unexpectedly in Santa Clara County and it designated the Rapid Response Network (RRN) hotline as an entry point to support services for newly arriving migrants.

In June 2023, the County executed a grant agreement with community partner and RRN operator Amigos to provide temporary emergency shelter and coordination of support services to recent arrivals who were seeking asylum, were unhoused, and had entered the U.S. after May 11, 2023. Amigos has a deep understanding of Santa Clara County safety nets and had the capacity to administer a grant supporting individuals who needed to navigate complex and evolving regulations. Also, various County departments have worked in partnership with Amigos to connect families with health, educational, legal, and shelter needs. Between June 2023 and February 2024, the County invested a total of $710,000 to help meet the needs of 60 families, consisting of 202 adults and 167 children, seeking asylum.

Summary of County Grant Funding to Amigos to Address the Needs of New Arrivals

Date	Amount
June 27, 2023	$360,000
January 23, 2024	$150,000
February 6, 2024	$200,000
Total:	**$710,000**

Separately, in January 2024, the City of San José approved $150,000 to Amigos to augment the funding received from the County. Additionally, to facilitate the connection of newly arrived families and individuals to immigration legal support services, the City of San José, Amigos, Tahirih Justice Center, and OIR hosted a legal services consultation clinic with 32 attorneys and nine volunteers on June 20, 2024. The event was held at the Roosevelt Community Center in San José and resulted in 29 individuals receiving full-scope screening.

Community Engagement

Immigrant Belonging Project

In FY 2023-2024, OIR continued the Immigrant Belonging Project, a two-year needs assessment in partnership with consultant OBI, to better understand what is important to Santa Clara County's diverse immigrant communities. The findings will yield recommendations on how to better address the challenges and recognize the contributions of these important communities. The results will also inform future decisions around policy, funding, and service delivery.

The first phase of the project was completed in April 2023 and consisted of stakeholder interviews. Data from the interviews informed a Community Survey, which was implemented between August 2023 and November 2023. During this second phase, OIR conducted outreach to promote the survey, which was available in 12 languages and could be completed over the phone, online, or in person. OIR engagement with the community (i.e., community events, newsletters, community meetings, and social media outreach) involved 529 organizations and over 124 activities. Following the extensive outreach, **2,881 surveys were collected**, which exceeded the goal of 1,500 completed surveys.

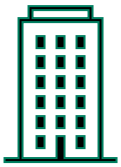
Community Survey Outreach Outcomes:

Total number of individuals reached: 36,419

Engaged with 6 local jurisdictions

Engaged with 11 school districts

Engaged with 23 County departments



Engaged with 5 other DESJ offices

The project's final phase, which is currently under way, will further explore key issues through community conversations. A final report with recommendations will be released in June 2025.

Citizenship Day

Every year, the Santa Clara County Citizenship Collaborative—a group of government, community-based organizations (CBOs), legal support services providers, and community leaders—comes together to launch Citizenship Day through its Project New Citizen. The County has funded the Citizenship Collaborative for 27 years, since its inception in 1997. The Citizenship Collaborative coordinates Project New Citizen to address needs of low-income immigrants by providing information, referrals, and direct citizenship application services, including during the annual Citizenship Day event. More than 130,000 Santa Clara County residents have begun their pathway to U.S. citizenship through Project New Citizen. Currently, there are over 250,000 legal permanent residents in Santa Clara County who are eligible to become citizens but have not yet applied for citizenship.

Citizenship Day 2024 was held at San José City College on April 20, 2024, and created a space for individuals to receive safe and confidential services. Santa Clara County's Citizenship Day was spotlighted at the Unidos U.S. National Conference in Las Vegas during a session on "Unleashing the Power of Naturalization: Building Wealth, Power, and Civic Engagement."

Highlights:

- 839 participants
- 143 applications filed
- 105 application fee waivers submitted
- Information offered in 14 languages: Amharic, Arabic, Cantonese, English, Farsi, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Pashto, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

World Refugee Day

OIR has been a member of the Refugee and Immigrant Forum (RIF), a leading local advocacy organization and an expert forum on refugee and immigrant issues, for 23 years. Participation in RIF allows OIR to maintain relationships with various refugee communities. Annually, OIR and RIF co-host a World Refugee Day event to recognize the resilience of refugees in rebuilding their lives as well as the work of partner agencies providing critical support to this population. World Refugee Day is recognized internationally to honor the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home country in order to escape persecution, war, terror, or natural disasters. It is a day to build empathy and understanding for refugee circumstances.

Santa Clara County's latest World Refugee Day event was held at the Campbell Community Center on June 14, 2024, and drew over 400 people, including OIR's 2024 NAF fellows. The event consisted of live entertainment, food, a resources fair, and attendance from many partners.

Photos from https://sccrif.org/home/elementor-350.

New Americans Fellowship

OIR's NAF program welcomed its eighth cohort in summer 2024. The cultural and educational backgrounds of the cohort's 12 fellows were as diverse as their talents and career aspirations. The fellows represented seven countries of origin, together speaking over a dozen languages. Most fellows were recent immigrants or refugees, and all fellows were holders of a temporary immigration status. The program placed the fellows in a supportive setting for 10 weeks, where they could explore and affirm their personal cultural identifications while being of service to the community.

2024 NAF Cohort

Back row (left to right):

- Jonathan Hailu Bekele (Ethiopia)
- Marwa Wasil (Afghanistan)
- Fakhrolsadat Hashemi (Iran)
- Ganna Zgama (Ukraine)
- Cintia Vargas (Mexico)
- Julian Arroyave-Vergara (Colombia)
- Juan Pablo Loaiza (Colombia)

Front row (left to right):

- Sara Setaish Wasil (Afghanistan)
- Vania Behnoud (Iran)
- Najiya Batool (Pakistan)
- Juan Coronado (OIR staff)
- Sandy Vasquez (OIR staff)
- Nilab Wasil (Afghanistan)
- Mursal Usra Wasil (Afghanistan)

OIR continued its collaboration with Mosaic America, a nonprofit promoting community unity through intercultural programming. This partnership shaped the topics covered throughout NAF's curriculum, which included U.S. immigration history, systemic inequality, and how art can be a powerful tool for promoting social cohesion. Also, training in GIS (geographic information system) mapping and qualitative research enabled fellows to create compelling community stories through social media to foster inclusivity and respect for diversity.

The fellows' culminating project focused on increasing voter engagement among young adults aged 18 to 30, particularly those of Chinese, Korean, and Latinx/e[6] descent. The fellows conducted a comprehensive research project, building community networks, conducting fieldwork, and analyzing data to identify barriers and motivators for voting within these populations. Their efforts emphasized the importance of civic engagement in empowering immigrant communities, and the research process was enhanced by 12 individual interviews and four focus group discussions with experts in voter mobilization and community engagement.

The findings were used to develop outreach materials aimed at increasing voter turnout, including videos and social media content specifically designed to resonate with young voters. These materials were created in collaboration with community leaders, communication specialists, and young people to ensure their authenticity and impact. The videos are now available on the OIR website[7] and serve as a resource for community partners and County departments.

In addition to coordinating NAF's research and professional development components, OIR matched the fellows with County mentors. Mentors provided valuable guidance, helping the fellows gain a deeper understanding of County government and prepare for future careers.

[6] Latinx and Latine are non-binary terms; however, the terms Latino and Latina are also used to represent the same populations.
[7] https://desj.santaclaracounty.gov/offices/office-immigrant-relations/new-americans-fellowship

Map representing the 2024 NAF Cohort's countries of origin

2024 NAF Mentors:

- **Angelica Díaz** – Healthy Communities Branch Director, Public Health Department
- **Kevin Gaytan** – Social Worker III, Social Services Agency
- **Husam Hatahet** – Graphic Designer, DESJ
- **Supreet Kaur** – Labor Standards Investigator, Office of Labor Standards Enforcement
- **Alexander Lin** – Acting Chief of Staff, District 2 Office
- **Michelle Osorio-Pelayo** – Deputy Chief of Staff, District 3 Office
- **Angela Roberts** – Communications Director, District 3 Office
- **Cassandra Staff** – Program Manager II, Office of Women's Policy
- **Saldy Suriben** – Senior Management Analyst, Office of LGBTQ Affairs
- **Buu Thai** – Administrative Services Manager III, Consumer & Environmental Protection Agency
- **Monica Tong** – Program Manager III, Office of Intergovernmental Relations
- **Samuel Torres** – Senior Research & Evaluation Specialist, DESJ
- **Jessie Yu** – Program Manager II, Office of Labor Standards Enforcement

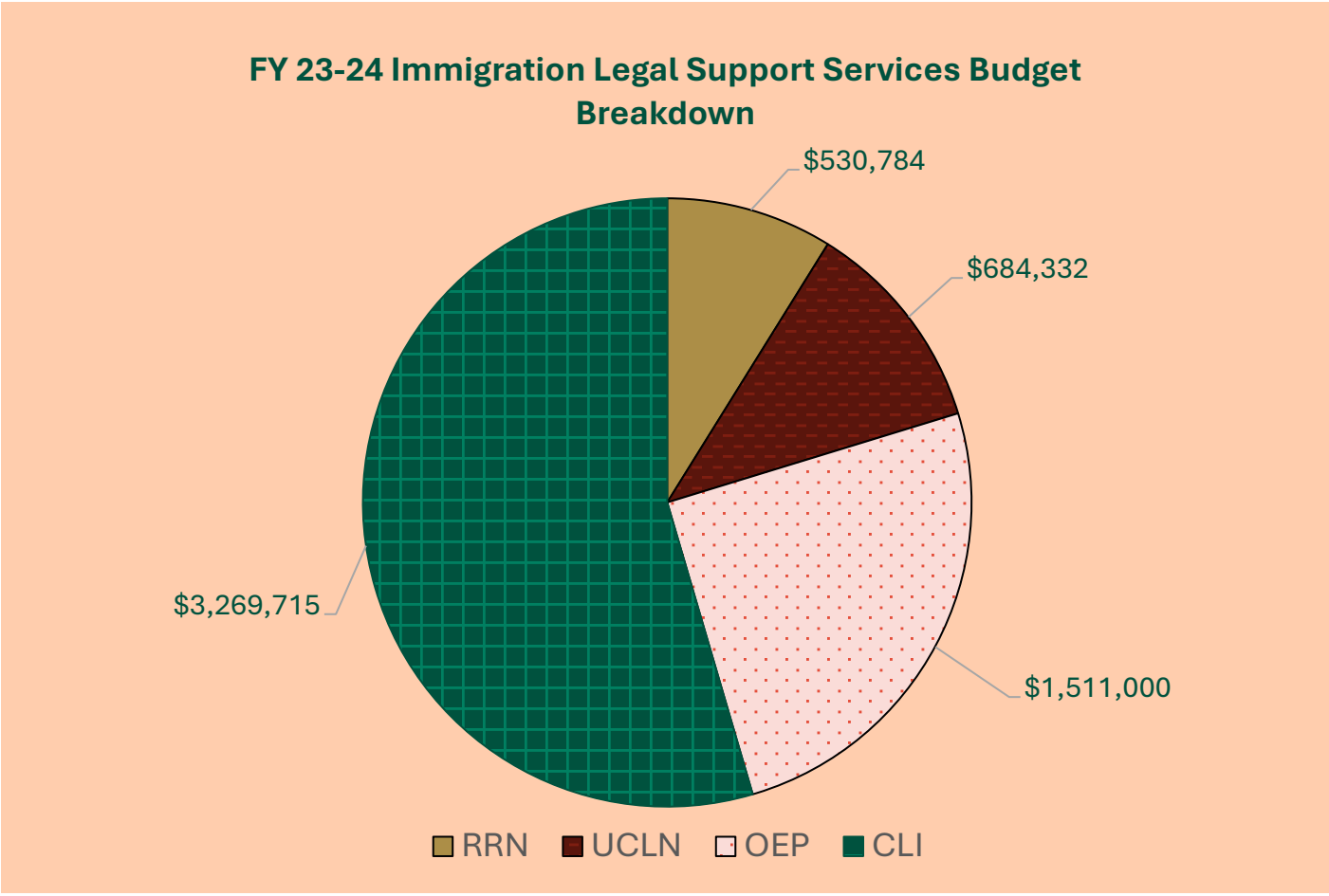
Through a diverse curriculum, analytical research projects, and strong community partnerships, fellows gain skills, knowledge, and networks that they can leverage to become future leaders in their communities. The NAF program helps ensure that the voices and contributions of immigrants in Santa Clara County are recognized and valued.

Community Services

Immigration Legal Support Services Contracts

Having access to free or cost-effective immigration legal support services is pivotal to immigrant community members in Santa Clara County. In FY 2023-2024, OIR administered contracts with 16 CBOs totaling $5,995,831. Service categories included 1) Case Management, Legal Representation, and Intervention (CLI); 2) Outreach, Education, and Prevention (OEP); 3) Rapid Response Network Coordination (RRN); and 4) Unmet Civil Legal Needs (UCLN). Provision of services resulted in the following outcomes:

- 2,670 unduplicated clients received CLI services.
  - → CLI services included 4,812 consultations, representations, and/or applications submitted.
- 5,782 unduplicated clients received OEP services.
  - → OEP services included 63,127 events, workshops, and/or orientations.
- 3,683 unduplicated clients received RRN services.
  - → RRN services included a total of 1,065 calls, consultations, events, and/or trainings.
- 1,813 unduplicated clients received UCLN services.
  - → UCLN services included 1,098 workshops, events, consultations, representations, and/or applications submitted.



Immigration law, policy, and litigation have become more complex in recent years. The pending caseload of U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS) continues to grow, which has resulted in an increased net backlog. According to USCIS, its recent pending caseload (through the end of FY 2022-2023) was over 9 million, and its net backlog was over 4 million. This is an increase compared to FY 2018-2019, when there were approximately 6 million pending cases and a net backlog of around 2.5 million. The reliance of USCIS on paper-based forms has also contributed to the backlog. Although USCIS published 17 forms online, applicants must still complete physical forms for most immigration applications. The growing length of USCIS applications and the lack of resources to publish more forms online have delayed the agency's digitization endeavors, increasing the average processing times from less than four months in 2012 to over a year by 2022. The backlog leads to delays and presents challenges, especially for noncitizens, some of whom may wait for years for their cases to be heard in immigration courts. Further, the backlog has resulted in increased work for attorneys, immigration judges, and court staff as well as workforce management challenges for the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review.

Community Education

OIR coordinates trainings and presentations to County departments, the general public, and service providers regarding immigrant matters. In FY 2023-2024, OIR coordinated 14 in-depth trainings, reaching 450 individuals. The trainings focused on demographics, local and national policies, immigration law updates, welcoming newcomers to public schools, disaster planning with the immigrant community in mind, and public charge updates. Training topics included the following:

- The Importance of Cultural Consideration in Disaster Planning
- Newcomer Training
- Immigrant Demographics in Santa Clara County
- Public Charge
- The Santa Clara County Immigrant Context
- The Immigrant Rights Movement in Santa Clara County
- Current Immigration Policy
- The Immigrant Community in Santa Clara County: Expanding the Definitions of Leadership
- History of the Local Immigrant Rights Movement
- Immigrant Communities and the Safety Net in California

Looking Ahead

Santa Clara County has a long history of being a welcoming community for immigrants. While immigration policy is complex, OIR's commitment to helping ensure that all residents feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging is unwavering. We will continue to monitor federal policies and state actions that impact our immigrant communities.

Federal Issues to Watch

- Impact of Presidential election outcome
- Employment authorization issues
- Executive Orders related to enforcement and suspension of entry
- Changes to asylum law and the process of seeking asylum
- Temporary Protected Status requirements and eligibility Supr
- eme Court response to DACA

Highlights of California's Pro-Immigrant Actions

- The state's budget maintenance of $10 million in funding for Temporary Protected Status Immigration Services and of $5.2 million in funding for the California State University Immigration Legal Services Project.
- The state upholding its commitment to #Health4All—California made history on January 1, 2024, by becoming the first state to provide access to health care for all income-eligible residents, regardless of immigration status.
- The state continuing to fund In-Home Supportive Services for undocumented Medi-Cal recipients.

FY 2024-2025 OIR Goals

- Complete the recruitment to hire new OIR Manager.
- Support the County's response to potential federal policy changes.
- Finalize the Immigrant Belonging Project.
- Host the ninth NAF cohort.